

# Michigan *TimeTraveler*

An educational supplement produced by Lansing Newspapers In Education, Inc. and the Michigan Historical Center

## The Quartermaster

## KID'S History

Today's Time Traveler visits Fort Wilkins in the Upper Peninsula where a new exhibit describes the life and work of the U.S. Army quartermaster—the person responsible for transporting all the people, food and supplies needed to build the fort.



## Who Was the Quartermaster?

Five hundred miles from Detroit! And no roads! In 1844 the U.S. Army quartermaster had to get soldiers, their families and belongings, along with all the supplies they needed to build the new fort, to Copper Harbor on the tip of Keweenaw Peninsula.

Transporting people and their possessions safely was a big challenge—particularly since the quartermaster could not control the weather and everything had to be shipped by boat.

The quartermaster provided soldiers with all their uniforms, pots and pans, and tools while they were at the fort. He supervised construction of all the buildings, as well as the dock and roads. He bought all the necessary horses and oxen, as well as hay to feed them. While he did not provide weapons, food, medicine or hospital supplies, the quartermaster was responsible for moving and storing these important supplies.

Fort Wilkins was established in 1844 so that soldiers could keep the peace when miners came searching for copper. Twelve original and seven reconstructed buildings stand today.



**Miniature Soldiers:** Collection Specialist, Eric Perkins, paints 15 mm scale metal figures for the diorama of Fort Wilkins. Many of the figures had to be customized to show soldiers doing everyday jobs like cleaning, painting and hauling firewood.



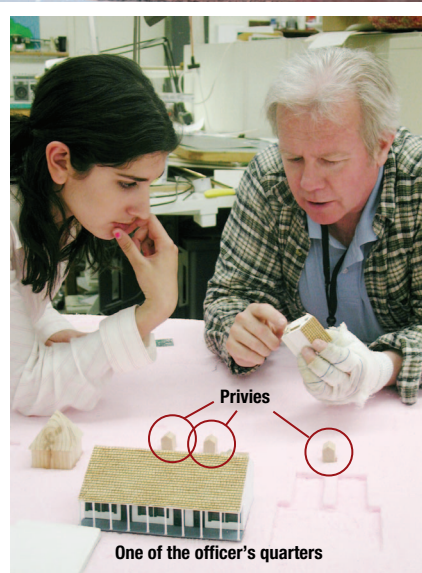
A board game at Fort Wilkins, created by exhibit designer/graphic artist, Susan Cooper, simulates bringing supplies in the 1840s from Detroit.

## Things To Do

- At [www.michigan.gov](http://www.michigan.gov), search for
  - Fort Wilkins and Copper Harbor Lighthouse
  - Mining in Michigan
- Visit Fort Wilkins and Copper Harbor Lighthouse
- June 19-August 20: Role-playing interpreters from Northern Michigan university bring history to life at Fort Wilkins. (10 a.m.-5 p.m. Daily)
- August 7-8: Civil War Living History Encampment
- Comments or Suggestions? Write to [timetraveler@michigan.gov](mailto:timetraveler@michigan.gov)

The Michigan Historical Museum gratefully acknowledges the Michigan Coastal Management Program, Michigan Department of Environmental Quality, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce for their funding for this project.

**Above:** Rich Geer used historical documents to draw this picture of soldiers building Fort Wilkins.



**Diorama:** Karyn Heavenrich, a senior at East Lansing High School, visits with artist Rich Geer, who is creating miniature buildings for the Fort Wilkins diorama. Karyn is doing an internship at the Michigan Historical Museum earning credits for the National Honor Society.



**The Housewife:** Collection Historian, Laurie Dickens, makes reproduction "housewives" copied from an original in the Michigan Historical Museum's collection. Soldiers carried "housewives" during their military service as a place to keep sewing needles, thread, thimbles and patches. To reproduce a "housewife," Dickens researched fabric patterns, went to a local fabric store to match them with similar modern day patterns, drew a paper pattern from the original, cut it out of the fabric and then hand sewed it together.

## Recreating History—Through Three-Dimensional Objects

The exhibits team from the Michigan Historical Museum includes historians, designers, collection specialists and a carpenter. Recently they created a new exhibit about the life and work of the quartermaster at Fort Wilkins.

The team met on site at the fort to brainstorm the best way to tell the quartermaster's story. They asked themselves, "How do you take historical facts and turn them into a three-dimensional exhibit that visitors want to see?" They needed to decide on the story they wanted to tell, and then create a context for displaying artifacts to tell it.

When visitors look at the exhibit, they see different kinds of three-dimensional objects that archaeologists from Michigan Technological University found at the fort—bricks, nails, mortar and buttons. The quartermaster shipped and stored them.

Sometimes archaeologists find artifacts that are too fragile to display. Other times, they find only fragments. To help complete the story, museum team members make or buy reproduction artifacts. These show what tools and uniforms would have looked like when they were new.

Finally, the museum team built a background setting making shelves, crates and cloth bales (used for shipping uniforms). These props help create a setting that gives the visitor a better sense, or feeling for the historical environment.

For the most part, the reproduction artifacts are in places where people can touch them. All the real artifacts are protected in cases or behind plexi-glass barriers.



Soldiers used knives to skin the cattle they butchered. Archaeologists uncovered these bones outside the stockade gates.

DATE:	Pork.	Frash Beef.	Salt Beef.	Bacon.	Flour.	Hard Bread.	Corn Meal.	Rice.	Beans.	Whiskey.	Candles.	Soup.	Salt.	Yams.	Coffee.	Sugar.	Onions.	Apples.	Wheat.	Barley.	Peas.	Butter.
	Pounds.	Pounds.	Pounds.	Pounds.	Pounds.	Pounds.	Pounds.	Pounds.	Pounds.	Pounds.	Pounds.	Pounds.	Pounds.	Pounds.	Pounds.	Pounds.	Pounds.	Pounds.	Pounds.	Pounds.	Pounds.	Pounds.
Sicut S. Ruggles, 5 <sup>th</sup> St. N.Y.																						
May 17	16	32	617		89	90	31	10	32	30	10	37		10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	
June 3	195	327			72	148	152		160	33	15	327		72	148	152		160	33	15	327	
July 11	148	463			51	5	15	6	8	16	19	171		40	5	5		40	5	5	171	
Aug 27	189	321			38	30	15	19		5	13	116		150	3	48	28	150	3	48	28	
Sept 9	71	3230			101	56	15	19	365			161		45	38	3	170	3	3	3	161	
Oct 30	130	2220			51	5	15	19	382	6	3	94		35	30	10	35				94	
Nov 8	104	5338			126	45	15	16	1224	3		389		125	46	10	10				389	
Dec 20	105	5325			105	152	13	16	899	3		781		114	43	24	47				781	
Jan 7	70	5355			37	77	11	3	705	3	11	633		99	37	21	11				633	

Soup.	Salt.	Yams.	Coffee.	Sugar.	Onions.	Apples.	Wheat.	Barley.	Peas.	Butter.
Pounds.	Pounds.	Pounds.	Pounds.	Pounds.	Pounds.	Pounds.	Pounds.	Pounds.	Pounds.	Pounds.
A. C. S. Port Wiggins N.Y.										
May 17	15	10	10	32	37	148	152	10	32	37
June 3	11	9	148	5	54	105	116	42	32	37
July 11	7	9	105	5	38	44	3	30	48	28
Aug 27	3	6	85	28	150	97	35		566	161
Sept 9	3	3	37	38	157	32	35	39	136	10
Oct 30	3	10	35		144	3	15	14	12	10
Nov 8	46	10	46		137	33	46	37	118	733
Dec 20	24	40	47	38	152	24	40	20	116	5
Jan 7	31	21	14	108	108	33	47	107	73	7

The quartermaster was responsible for transporting food to Fort Wilkins in good condition, but it often spoiled before it got there. Officers were responsible for examining, weighing and listing the supplies when they arrived in Copper Harbor. Here is a sample of Lieutenant Daniel Ruggles' log.

## At the Michigan Historical Museum

Visit the copper mine gallery and learn more about the industry that started at Copper Harbor. The Michigan Historical Museum, 702 W. Kalamazoo Street, is located two blocks west of the Capitol in downtown Lansing. Museum admission is free. Hours: Monday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.; Saturday, 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.; Sunday, 1:00 to 5:00 p.m. The museum telephone hotline: (517) 373-3559. The museum is part of the Michigan Historical Center, Department of History, Arts and Libraries. Visit us at the Web at [www.michiganhistory.org](http://www.michiganhistory.org).



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